

The Impact of Social Statuses on Education in Chinese Society

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Abstract: Diverse and complex influencing factors affect the level of education in China; however, few studies show the relationship between social class and education level. In order to further explore the influencing factors of education level, this study focuses on the influence of social class on educational experiences. A method of quantitative questionnaires is used as the research methodology. The main finding of this study is: a correlation exists between educational level and social status, both in terms of individual and general public perceptions. Based on the finding, some future research directions in the field of education can be considered. This study also tries to propose limitations of the survey: a lack of abundant participants and a clear definition of education level. Previous studies directly examined the relationship between social status and educational experiences. This current study further provides a new perspective on equality education and inspires future research on equalizing social distributions.

Keywords: Social status, Education, Public, Private, Institution

1. Introduction

China has permanently attached great importance to cultivating national education as a populous country. Influenced by the Confucian ideology, Chinese people have attached great importance to education since ancient times. In the 1970s, with the proclamation and implementation of reform and opening-up policy, China's education system made much progress, and our overall education level has improved remarkably and continuously [1]. In China, people of different social classes have different educational experiences. However, few studies have directly examined the social status and educational experiences. Thus, this research will explore how different social classes affect Chinese adults' educational experiences through a quantitative questionnaire. Owing to the lack of data support from a large number of samples, the results of the study may not represent the entire situation of Chinese society. The study addresses three aspects (public school, private school, and socioeconomic backgrounds) and also tries to propose limitations and future directions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Concept and Current Situation

2.1.1. Definition of Social Class in China

In the socialist planned economy era, China's social strata were mainly divided into three categories: peasants, workers, and cadres [2]. However, since the publicity of the reform and opening-up policy in 1978, the economy of China has developed rapidly and entered the market economy era. In this case, new social classes emerged. According to the report issued by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in 2002, Chinese citizens' social strata have been classified in light of their occupations and the differences in access to wealth, power, and status [3]. In this study, the classification of social strata is based on family socioeconomic status (SES), which is mainly reflected in household income.

2.1.2. Current Situation

As a diversified country, the importance of education has always been emphasized [4]. Most Chinese student associations have gone through the education process from kindergarten, primary school, junior high school, and high school to university. Because of the nine-year compulsory education system, most students have similar educational experiences before high school. However, they would make different choices after graduating from junior high school, for there are various types of high schools, such as entering public or private high school. In Wang's research, he argues that those different choices are caused by different social classes, which even result in accumulative and continuous gaps in opportunities to access higher education [5]. Some researchers believe that social class represents individuals' relative status in the social hierarchy and their beliefs viewing their positions in society. In almost all cases, people in a higher social class may enjoy advantages over those belonging to a lower social class regarding social and economic resources and culture [6]. In addition, education inequality still exists and has diverse degrees of influence on different social classes. The education system in China has been significantly expanded, and the average education level of the vast population has been remarkably improved. Due to the progress, there have been educational inequalities in many aspects [7]. The remarkable regional gap in China, especially the urban-rural gap, is one of the astonishing aspects of the educational environment. Although the government endeavors to improve educational inequality, education in urban areas has more resources and opportunities than in rural areas in almost all aspects [8]. As a result, the wide urban-rural gap leads to growing social mobility. Under the circumstance of rapid but unbalanced social and economic development, many Chinese people regard the college entrance examination as a turning point of fortune. Also, it is considered one of the few ways to get out of rural areas [9]. The transformation of the education policies and resource allocation, however, only has aggravated the inequalities between different regions and classes [10].

2.2. Factors

Most of the old generation of the middle class, who have undergone significant changes since reform and opening up, have accumulated substantial social capital. This capital can be conducive to better education for their descendants [11]. In Sheng's research, students from high-income families are more likely to enter a top college than those from low-income ones [12]. Besides the economic situation, other factors such as different types of hukou (household registration) cause different educational experiences. Under normal circumstances, individuals with urban hukou can obtain better educational resources and opportunities than those with rural hukou; moreover, people

with hukou in first-tier cities obtain a better education than those with hukou in other areas. The two main factors in Kim, Tong, and Sun's research are living and learning environments. They argue that students' academic achievement and educational aspirations are closely related to a high proportion of peers from a higher social background when entering a school instead of their socioeconomic status [13]. According to a survey about Chinese parents' awareness of educating their children, different families' backgrounds would lead to different educational expectations [14]. Parents' educational levels and occupations can also cause discrepancies. In Soong's research, those parents who have studied or worked abroad or have relatives migrating to foreign countries are more willing to send their children to international schools [15].

2.3. Hypothesis

In recent research, there has been a lack of data directly indicating the relationship between social class and educational experience in China. Despite that, many previous studies and research have shown that educational experiences are closely related to social class. In the process of receiving education, people may make diverse choices because of different social classes, such as the time and the place of education. This study explores the influence of different social classes on the educational experiences of Chinese individuals, as the central hypothesis is that social classes positively affect educational experiences.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Our respondents were counted, and fifty-nine out of sixty-one met the survey requirements. That is, they were older than eighteen years old. All of the following statistics are the percentage of these adult participants.

Gender

The gender ratio of our respondents is 6 to 4, male to female.

Education level

38.98% of the respondents have a Bachelor's degree, and 22.03 % have an Associate's or Master's degree. The percentage of those still in high school is 16.95 %, and 1.69% are educated at the junior high school level. Therefore, the majority of the respondents are at a higher education level.

Estimated family income range

The family situation of the respondents is set into three grades in the questionnaire. Among them, 42.37% of the sale price inserts the annual family income between 300,000 and 800,000 RMB, and 40.68% of the respondents' annual family income is less than 300,000 RMB. At the same time, 16.95% of the respondents have a household income higher than \$800,000.

Family location

After the screening, roughly one-third of the respondents are from Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen. Meanwhile, about a quarter of the respondents are from provincial capital cities/special economic zones. About 10.17 percent are from prefectural cities, counties, and faraway/remote villages. Finally, another one-tenth comes from the suburbs.

College/university location

The statistics show that 79.66% of the participants attend college in China, and 20.34% go to college in foreign countries.

Annual spending on tuition

59.32% of the participants spend less than \$10,000 per year on tuition, 28.81% spend between \$10,000 and \$100,000 per year on tuition, and the rest spend at least \$100,000 on tuition.

Types of schools

The ratio of respondents who attend public schools to those who attend private schools is 51 to 8.

Annual spending on extra-curricular activities and paid help sessions

62.71% of respondents spend less than \$10,000 on extracurricular classes, 32.2% spend between \$10,000 and \$100,000, and the rest spend more than \$100,000 on extracurricular classes.

Most questionnaire participants belonged to middle-class families, came from large cities, and received their education in the country. However, most adults spent no more than \$10,000 on education inside and outside the school. Therefore, even though the participants' family conditions were average or substantial, the amount of money spent on education was relatively small.

3.2. Procedures

In order to better investigate whether different social classes in China impact Chinese adults' educational experiences, questionnaires are necessary to obtain relevant information and analyze it using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. This study is a study of the effect of Chinese classes on the educational level of adults in China. This current study requires the primary condition that all study participants must be older than eighteen. The questionnaire is collected anonymously through social media. The questionnaire includes nine questions related to basic personal information to better screen and classifies the respondents' identity and background. In addition, twenty-two questions were set up to examine respondents' perceptions of the impact of class on the educational level of Chinese people. After a period of questionnaire distribution, a total of sixty-one data were collected. Since the two respondents are not adults, we have excluded them from the result.

Measurement 1. The survey can be divided into four parts. The first part contains twelve questions measuring the participants' background information and education levels. Questions, such as "where you grew up?" The participants are given six choices indicating where their families are located while they finish their educational careers. This question is intended to determine if locations are an effective factor in their attitudes about social classes. Another example is asking about estimating participants' family income ranges, which helps to measure their social status. All other questions in this section further access the education levels and the original family social classes.

Measurement 2. The second part of the questionnaire contains four questions about the participants' beliefs about public schools, including elementary, secondary, and higher education. The questions are being measured from a scale of "mostly agreeable" to "mostly disagreeable", ranging from six to zero points. Participants who answer "mostly agreeable" will get six points, which indicates they are toward Hypothesis One because they believe social classes are a factor in education. Questions in this section, such as "Students who attend public schools are more likely to stay in China for college" shows their agreeableness toward the education system in China. The second example, "Students in public schools are under more pressure", measures participants' beliefs about students' experiences in public schools. All four questions help to evaluate the data about how general people think about their experiences in public schools.

Measurement 3. Measurement Three requires participants to answer their opinions on private schools. Question choices remain using the six-point scale. This section contains five questions, all evaluating people's attitudes about private education. Questions focus on participants' beliefs about whether private schools have a better education experience. For example, "Private schools often have better educational resources" and "Students in private schools usually have a better chance of getting into top colleges" measure the general belief that private schools have better educational outcomes due to more abundant resources for students. Participants who score higher in this section are more confident in believing in the private school education systems.

Measurement 4. The last section continues to use the same rating scale. Questions in this section primarily focus on accessing participants' opinions on the effectiveness of social classes in education. One question, "I have to consider my family's income when deciding where to go to college", evaluates how social class levels play a role in their educational careers. Other questions, "My family has the ability to support my educational career", "I have or had a part-time job during college because of economic reasons", and "My family gave me many supports when I applied for colleges", all help to determine how general people believe about different social status and if these status are a barrier when pursuing education. The questions are expressed in first-person pronounce in order to make connections to the participants, so they can make sure they are answering the questions from their perspectives.

3.3. Data Analysis

The data are collected through social media and analyzed in three parts: the effectiveness of public schools, private schools, and socioeconomic statuses. All three sections (not including the background measurements) will use statistical analysis (SPSS) to see if there is a correlation between how the general public views education opportunities and social status. Any questionnaires that are not completed (< 90%) or participants under eighteen will be excluded from the results.

4. Results

The SPSS analytical software package shows a slight correlation between the education level and social status of Chinese adults regarding public attitudes. The result indicates that the correlation coefficient is 0.254. For individual attitudes, there is also a slight correlation between Chinese adults' educational level and social status.

According to the central hypothesis, Chinese adults' family social status positively affects their educational attainment.

Firstly, as shown in Figure 1, many people consider spending money when choosing a school. 38.98% of people would choose that school because some schools are low cost.

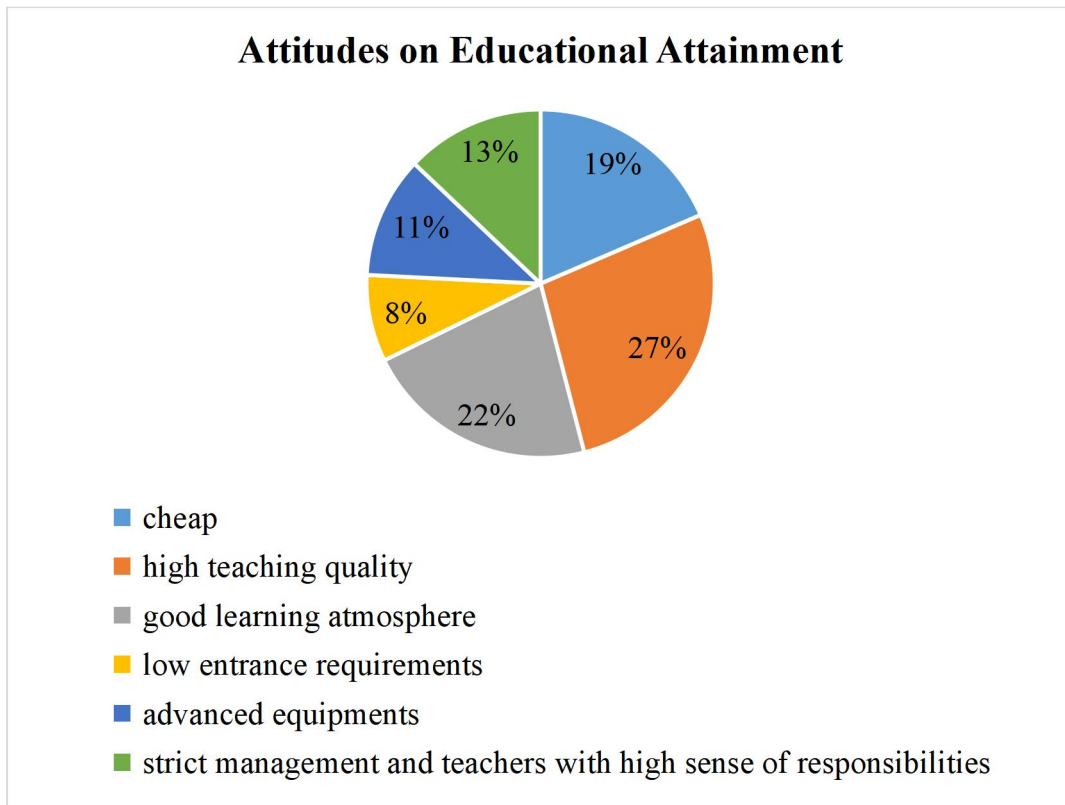


Figure 1: The graph illustrates the different ratios of each choice selected by participants about their attitudes on educational attainment.

Photo credited: Original

Secondly, 44.06% of the participants in the questionnaire agreed that those with higher family social titles would study in private schools, while 25.42% were neutral about this. At the same time, 38.98% thought private schools had relatively better teaching resources, while 32.2% were neutral about this. Thus, people with higher family social status tend to receive a better education.

Thirdly, districts also impact a student's educational attainment. The area also represents the social status of the family. The data from this questionnaire shows that people who live in prosperous areas can perform better in school than those who live in relatively backward areas. This will also give students a better chance to attend better schools and have a brighter future. In addition, extra-curricular classes can help students to get better instructional support. This view was shared by 59.32% of the survey participants. The need to receive extra-curricular education requires good family financial support and status support to find good instructors and afford the associated costs. There is 77.97% support that upper-class students can receive financial and material support from their families. Thus, with the help of extra-curricular classes, upper-class Chinese adults tend to have a better level of education.

Fourthly, as shown in Figure 2, when deciding where to go to college, it is evident that family condition influences students' choice when choosing schools.

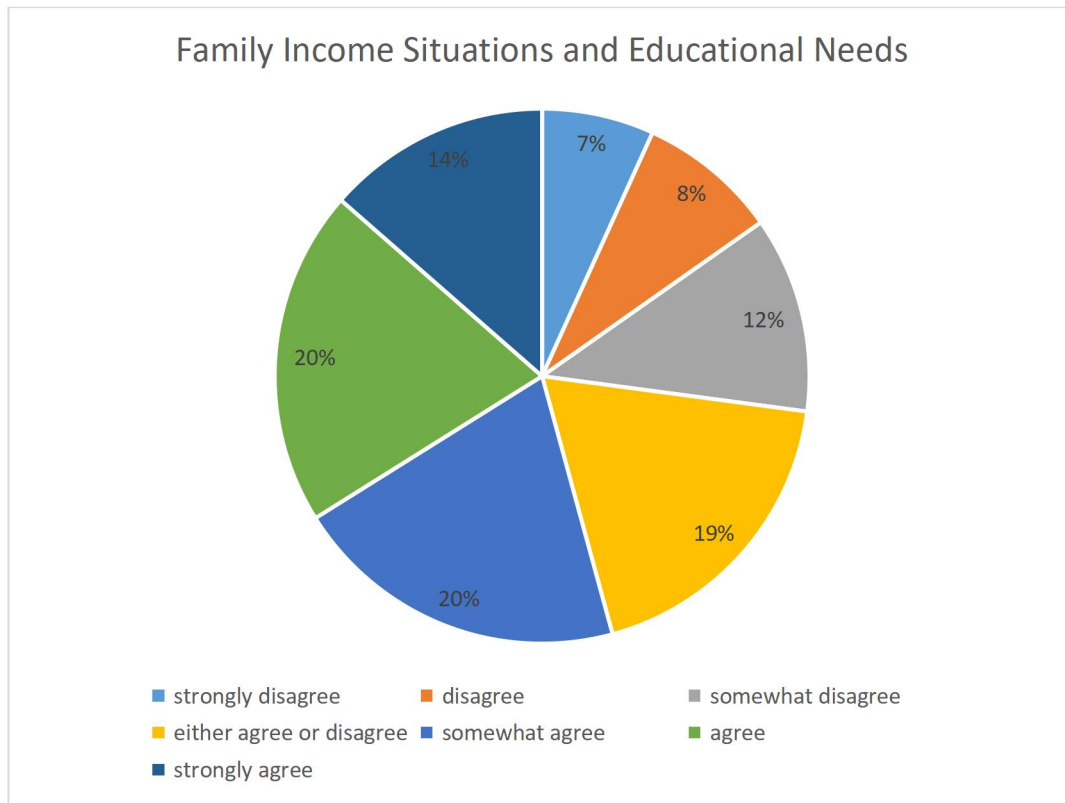


Figure 2: The graph illustrating the different ratios of each choices selected by participants about their attitudes of the relationship between family income situations and educational needs.

Photo credited: Original

The second conjecture is that the social status of their families does not influence the level of education of Chinese adults. There is 35.59%, and 28.81% believe that most students from private schools do not go to top schools and do go to top schools, respectively. This finding contradicts the central hypothesis to some extent; however, public-school students, who believe that public schools can go to better colleges, also spend more money on extra-curricular classes. Thus, this evidence does not support the idea that family status does not play a role in the educational attainment of Chinese adults.

5. Limitation and Future Direction

The number of our respondents could be more extensive. The authors can survey more people about the relationship between Chinese adults' education level and their families' class status. Respondents can also be stratified by age and family status in more detail. After that, more detailed information can be obtained. Perceptions of the relationship between the educational level of Chinese adults by different classes of people can be obtained and analyzed. Each family has different priorities for spending on education, and the questionnaire should be set up in such a way as to make a more detailed distinction between the amount of money each family spends on education. The definition of education level is different for each family, and the following survey should give respondents a more precise definition. Finally, this study examines a small part of the effect of family social status on children's minds and personalities. However, family social status may also significantly impact Chinese students' ideas about schooling. This should also be taken into account in future studies.

6. Conclusion

In the past few decades, dramatic changes have occurred in the education field. The factors that affect the level of education are complex and diverse. This study is absorbed in the impact of social status on the educational level of adults in China. Based on the results from quantitative questionnaires, a significant finding is discovered: There is a strong correlation between the educational level and social status of Chinese adults, both in the light of individual and general public perceptions. This research provides new perspectives and future direction on social and family influencing factors of education level in China. Since ancient times, Chinese people have always paid attention to education, whether poor or rich, living in urban or rural areas. This paper aims to deepen the public's understanding of the factors affecting the level of education to acquire a better way to improve the quality of education. However, this research still has some limitations. The number of participants in this questionnaire is small, so the result may not be representative. In addition, the questions in the questionnaire are not set to cover all aspects and do not give respondents a more straightforward definition of education level. For all that, this research has contributed to exploring the relationship between social class and educational level. Also, the result of this study provides a reference for further research in the field of education.

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